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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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President Begaye Asks Secretary Burwell's Tribal Advisory Committee for Cancer and Mental Health Facilities

WASHINGTON—Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye called for the establishment of cancer treatment and mental health facilities on the Navajo Nation in a tribal caucus held today by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Secretary's Tribal Advisory Committee (STAC).

"With 330,000 Navajo people, we could save money and provide our own immediate treatment," he said. "For services, many Navajo people go off reservation. We don't need to farm these services out."

President Begaye told the tribal caucus that cancer is the second highest cause of death on the Navajo Nation which emphasizes the Nation's need for cancer treatment facilities.

He noted that in-patient mental health facilities are needed to serve veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and the Nation's high suicide rate.

"We've recently had three suicides in communities that were affected by the Gold King Mine spill," he said. "It has created great concern for people in these areas."

President Begaye then addressed concerns the Nation has faced in dealing with the consequences of the recent Gold King Mine contamination spill.

"The next five generations will still be dealing with the effects of the river spill on our water and food systems," he said. "Our rivers and lands are contaminated. Even now we are feeling the impacts on our health."

President Begaye noted that he has sent a letter to Robert McSwain from Indian Health Services (IHS) asking for assistance in drilling wells in areas affected by the Gold King Mine spill. The letter also requested assistance with well water testing, the construction of a water treatment facility and a 90-day reservoir.

According to the president, McSwain has yet to respond.

“We have asked McSwain for help and he has given us a verbal affirmative but he hasn’t acted on it. We want a letter from him.”

President Begaye also expressed concern over how the Navajo Nation Health and Social Service programs are funded.

“We should not be in the category of discretionary funding as if we were a program within the Federal Government,” he said. “These funds should be provided to the Nation because we signed a treaty. It is the trust responsibility of the government and we should not be treated as a program.”

Tribal leaders convened at the tribal caucus to discuss budget updates, IHS issues and outreach efforts. The day’s session also saw updates from the Administration for Children and Families on the Indian Child Welfare Act, the National Institute of Health on the Precision Medicine Initiative and the Center of Disease Control on the work of CDC’s Tribal Advisory Committee.

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